

CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS: WHAT'S THE RIGHT DECISION?

Child care is a major decision as well as a major investment in a child's future. The majority of parents in Virginia must work outside the home, and, while there are many resources available, it is the parents' responsibility to find quality child care that meets the needs of their child and fits within their budget. This is not an easy task, and we thank you for taking the time to learn more about quality child care in Virginia.

Research shows us that by three years of age, a child's brain develops about 90 percent of its capacity. External child care is most often used for children between the ages of birth through four years old, when the majority of the brain is developing. (Source: "Early Brain Development and Child Care," [Healthy Child Care America](#) (Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1999), National Child Care Information Center, www.nccic.org.)

This publication is intended to provide guidance to assist those who must select other individuals to care for their child or children. High-quality child care is not universal, so it is essential to be aware of the multitude of considerations parents should research when looking for the best facility for their child. Some factors to consider include the environment, staff-to-child ratios, interaction and relationship-building, responsiveness and education level of the staff, discipline practices, educational programming, daily routines, meals, and accessibility. Parents have the power to give their child a fair advantage in life by enrolling him/her in a quality early care and education program.

Children are our most precious responsibility, and our decisions about them today will affect tomorrow's leaders. It is worth our time as parents to learn how to identify a quality child care program and use this information to select the best facility that will help our children reach their optimum potential. Once a child care program is selected, parents need to implement strategies for staying informed about what is happening while their children are in the care of others.

The Virginia Department of Social Services' Division of Child Care and Development hopes that this publication is informative and helpful to parents in their search for quality child care and contributes to positive decisions that nurture their child's development. For more information and links to other resources, please visit our Web site at www.dss.virginia.gov and select "Children" on the left side of the page, and then select "Child Care".

WHAT IS CONSIDERED CHILD CARE IN VIRGINIA?

A child care program in Virginia provides supervision and protection for a child who is younger than 13 years old. The program operates on a regular basis for periods that are less than twenty-four hours and represents an agreement between a parent or guardian and either a person or organization. Parents may choose from several types of child care arrangements, based on the child's age, development, personality, interests, etc. The general categories of care are in-home care and out-of-home care in a private home or a center.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Not all child care is regulated. Virginia law defines the types of child care that are subject to regulation; regulated facilities can include both licensed and unlicensed programs.

The types of child care in Virginia include the following:

Center-based Child Care	Family-based Child Care
• Licensed Child Day Center	• Licensed Family Day Home
• Unlicensed Child Day Center	• Voluntarily Registered or Local Ordinance Family Day Home
• Religiously-Exempt Child Day Center	• Family Day Home Approved by a Family Day System
• Certified Preschool System	
• Unregulated Child Day Center	• Unregulated Family Day Home

The allowed capacity, requirements, and level of monitoring vary among regulated care. There are no requirements for unregulated care; many family day homes are not monitored or regulated by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS).

In Virginia, a family day home provider must be licensed if she provides care in her home for more than five children who are less than 13 years old, in addition to her own children or other children who reside in the home. Additionally, a family day home must be licensed if the provider provides care in her home for more than four children who are less than two years of age, including her own children or children who reside in the home. Similarly, all child care centers must be licensed unless they are exempt from licensure in accordance with the law.



TYPES OF CHILD CARE

Child care settings in Virginia are usually one of the following:

CENTERS

- **A licensed child day center** provides care for two or more children in a setting other than a private home or for 13 or more children at any other location (e.g., private residence, commercial establishment). Centers must comply with the requirements set by the Child Day Care Council and enforced by VDSS. These requirements are found on the VDSS Web site at www.dss.virginia.gov and in the publication entitled *Standards for Licensed Child Day Centers*.

- **An unlicensed child day center** provides care for two or more children in a setting other than a private home and is not required by the *Code of Virginia* to be licensed. **Religiously exempt** programs and **certified preschools** are the two types of unlicensed care. While these programs are not required to be licensed, they are required to meet specific guidelines, and they are periodically monitored. These exemption guidelines and requirements are identified in the *Religiously Exempt Child Day Centers Booklet* located on the VDSS Web site at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/unlicensed.cgi>.

- **An unregulated child day center** provides care for two or more children in a setting other than a private home and is not required by the *Code of Virginia* to be licensed, religiously exempt, or certified. Examples of unlicensed centers would be certain short-term programs such as some camps and some recreation programs. Whether short-term programs must be licensed depends on factors such as the total amount of time they operate each year or the total amount of time a child is allowed to attend.

PRIVATE HOMES

- **A licensed family day home** provides care for up to 12 children, in addition to the provider's own children or children residing in the home, in a private home that is licensed by VDSS. These homes must maintain compliance with the *Minimum Standards for Licensed Family Day Homes*, which can be found at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/dayhome.html>.
- **A voluntarily registered family day home** is a home that can serve up to five children, in addition to the provider's own children or children residing in the home, and has registered with VDSS or an organization that is under contract with VDSS. These homes must comply with requirements contained in *Voluntary Registration of Family*



Day Homes: Requirements for Providers. A small sample of these homes is monitored by the contract agencies and VDSS. A listing of these agencies and areas served can be found at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/contractagency.html>.

- **A family day system home** provides child care to no more than twelve children, in addition to the provider's own children or children residing in the home. It is approved and monitored by an agency licensed by the state. The family day system and its homes must comply with the requirements contained in the *Minimum Standards for Licensed Family Day Care Systems*, which can be found at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/lcdc.html>.
- **An unregulated family day home** is not inspected by the state or its designee. It can legally provide care for no more than five children, in addition to the provider's own children or children residing in the home, or no more than four children under the age of two, including the provider's own children or children residing in the home, at any one time. Homes that exceed capacity are operating illegally.

IN-HOME CHILD CARE

- **In-Home child care** takes place when a provider cares for a child in the child's own home. This may be a live-in arrangement or an arrangement where the person provides care for part of the day. There are no licensing regulations for this type of care. The person may or may not have credentials or formal training in early childhood education. As the employer, the parent is responsible for finding someone who matches their requirements.

For all types of child care, the Division of Licensing Programs at VDSS will assist in screening child care programs by providing licensure information. Inspection reports may be reviewed online at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/licensed.cgi>.



Should read
"Regulated"

SUMMARY OF CHILD CARE IN VIRGINIA

Type	Licensed? or Regulated?	Capacity	Monitoring	Agency Handling Complaint Investigations
Licensed Child Day Center	Licensed	2 or more at a setting other than private residence; at least 13 or more if at a private residence	VDSS – twice a year	VDSS
Unlicensed Child Day Center	N/A	2 or more	None	Not Applicable
Religiously Exempt Center	Licensed	2 or more	VDSS – once a year, or as needed	VDSS
Certified Preschool	Regulated	N/A	VDSS	VDSS
Unregulated Child Day Center	N/A	2 or more	None	N/A
Licensed Family Day Home	Licensed	Maximum 12	VDSS – twice a year	VDSS
Voluntarily Registered Family Day Home	Regulated	Maximum 5	VDSS Approved Contract Agency randomly checks 10% of homes not on USDA Food Program; VDSS randomly checks 20% of all	VDSS and Contract Agency
Family Day Home System *	Licensed	Maximum 12	VDSS monitors System – twice a year System monitors homes – quarterly	VDSS for System System for homes
Unregulated Family Day Home	N/A	Maximum 5	None	Not Applicable
Child's Home	N/A	Total resident children	None	Not Applicable

*System is licensed; homes are regulated.

NOTE: Every child in Virginia is protected by law against child abuse and neglect. Allegations of abuse and neglect are investigated by local departments of social services. The Child Protective Services Hotline number is **1-800-552-7096**.

